

CHAPTER II

CHRONICLE OF JOURNEY TO MEXICO FOR NEW FOUNDATION

November 23, 1909 -- December 16, 1909

Sister Rosa de la Torre who was dispensed from the term of postulancy in 1907, having completed it with the cloistered nuns of the Santa Catalina de Siena Congregation. She arrived in time to begin with them the novitiate term in 1907 at the new Motherhouse at Mission San Jose. In October 28, 1908 this group made their first profession in the hands of Mother Pia Backes.

Preparations were being made to leave on November 23, 1909 as noted in the Motherhouse annals. Only four left on this first journey: Mother Seraphina Maerz, Sister Guadalupe Torres, Sister Rosa de la Torre and Josefina Veloz.

The other four left the Motherhouse December 12, 1909, arriving in Mexico City December 16 to complete the new pioneer community. These latter were: Sister Loretto Schafer, Sister Rosario Healy, Sister Catalina Gutierrez and Juana Brun.

Sister Guadalupe Torres continues the story with the following chronicle:

"November 23, 1909.

After having heard Mass and received Holy Communion, we left the sacred grounds of the Motherhouse at Mission San Jose [the Motherhouse was transferred from San Francisco to Mission San Jose] where we had spent so many happy and peaceful days. Deeply moved, we shed many tears as the time drew near for bidding farewell to our beloved Mother Pia Backes, Prioress General, and Novice Director and novice companions.

Before leaving we assembled in the hall leading to the enclosure, to receive our dear Mother General's blessing.

A buggy which was waiting at the door, took three of us to the Irvington Station where after a few moments, Mother Seraphina accompanied by a few other Sisters, rejoined us. The last moment arrived, and at the sound of the train whistle and the sudden "All Aboard!" cry of the conductor, who grabbed us by the arm to help us into the train, we were bound for Los Angeles.

As we settled ourselves in our places and passed the morning in brief conversation and prayer we experienced mixed feelings of anguish to be separated from the Motherhouse and joy to encounter a new adventure in Mexico. At noon we took a little lunch, as our appetite was not very great. The afternoon passed slowly and at about eight o'clock in the evening we reached Santa Barbara where Mother Seraphina [Maerz] and Sister Rosa de la Torre stopped until next morning to transact some business.

Since we had already become acquainted with this historic city from our studies of the Mission, our interest was greatly aroused during the few minutes the train was delayed.

At about 11: 30 p.m. the train pulled into the Los Angeles station, where a gentleman was waiting for us in a buggy. In a few minutes we were traversing the silent fog clad streets.

A bitter cold wind brought a high color to our cheeks. Soon the carriage came to a halt. A faint light shone from one of the windows of the Sacred Heart School. Sister Teresa Meyer awaited us at the door and after a hearty welcome and a light repast, we went to the chapel to give thanks and then retire to the rooms reserved for us. On the following day, after a good night's rest which had restored our exhausted forces, we joined the community who received us with the love and kindness so characteristic among us.

Mother Seraphina, accompanied by Sister Rosa de la Torre, arrived at the Sacred Heart Convent the following day. While Mother held the visitation, we occupied ourselves in touring the building and grounds. At the end of the visitation, we next went to Anaheim. What a beautiful house! What an enchanting spot! The convent was just being

enlarged. It goes without saying that Mother Seraphina was received with great joy, not only in this house, but in all our houses. After dinner we gathered together for recreation in the garden. We, who have never seen this part of the state before, were impressed by all the new sights. Nevertheless, we had become acquainted with this delightful place through the interesting accounts of our beloved novice directors, who had been in Anaheim before.

The visitation began and during the days while it lasted we visited the different parts of the house and had a good rest. We were lodged in the little house which at one time was destined for the Mother General. It was a sight worth seeing, when at the time for retiring in the evening, we appeared like the Three Kings wrapped in our mantles, walking in the cold damp air towards our little habitation.

When we left Anaheim we received an enlarged framed photograph of our Prioress General, Mother Pia Backes. The Sisters considered this to be the best gift they could offer to the new Community of Mexico, as indeed it was. This picture is still preserved with great care, love and reverence in the community room at Atzacapotzalco. As we were leaving, many asked that certain messages be given to Our Lady of Guadalupe, etc.

We entered the carriage which was to take us to the station. We had hardly arrived at the station when a man, breathless from running, came up to us carrying a package. He gave it to Mother Seraphina, with a stammering explanation that the owner of the bakery had just found out that morning that Mother Seraphina in the city and did not wish her to leave without a little gift from him. These good and grateful people have borne the same love and gratitude toward Mother Seraphina for many years. Needless to say, this little act touched us very much. The package contained canned goods, cookies, etc. for our journey.

The train soon pulled out and in a very short time we found ourselves at the train depot in the bustling city of Los Angeles, where Sister Rosaria [Huber] and Sister Camilla [Bahr] awaited us. They took us to St. Michael's. What a beautiful house! It was very clean, all in perfect order, with a very small miniature chapel housing the Blessed Sacrament. We passed the day most happily. The following day the rain fell in torrents. Since it was Sunday we went to the church next door to hear Mass. Sister Imelda [Meyer]

with a few other Sisters and a group of young ladies went to the choir loft, where they sang during Holy Mass and Benediction.

In the afternoon we made another visit to the church. The next morning Sister Magdalena [Thyke] and one of the other Sisters returned to Los Angeles to prepare the baggage. We were very busy all day and the following morning. We met Mother Seraphina and Sister Rosa at the Cathedral and from there we went to the train depot office to purchase our tickets; and then we were on our way to the transfer company where we hastily made all the necessary preparations for the next day's departure.

On December 8, after we recited the accustomed prayers for those leaving on a journey, we received the blessing of a Dominican Father in the chapel. We started for the station in different groups. We had but little to wait.

Very soon the "All Aboard!" cry of the conductor warned us that our train was about to pull out. Settled comfortably in our compartments, we bade farewell to our companions, who shed an ocean of tears. Soon only the white, waving handkerchiefs were visible. Nothing of importance occurred during the first part of our journey, from Los Angeles to El Paso. We passed large tracts of land which produced nothing pleasing to the eye. Dust was abundant and soon we saw ourselves obliged to close the windows while traversing the frontier states. The result was that we were almost suffocated from the intense heat. In spite of all precautions the clouds of dust and sand soon soiled our black traveling habits.

We arrived at El Paso at nine o'clock in the morning. Although the train for Mexico did not leave until six o'clock in the afternoon, we passed the intervening hours at the station. Finding ourselves alone in one of the waiting rooms, we took a light lunch. We left El Paso at six PM and soon found ourselves in Ciudad Juarez. The conductor checked our tickets and then told us to pass to the "Aduana" [custom-office] to have our baggage checked. An immense crowd had gathered at the station, some out of curiosity and others on business; the majority being people of the poorer class. We had some trouble in making our way through the crowd.

A young lady from the custom-office came to meet us. She opened one of the trunks, and observed that it contained

new clothing and many pieces of the same material. On opening the second trunk she informed us that it would have to be checked. Calling one of the employees, she explained our case to him, but he, showing no personal interest whatsoever, decided to transfer the entire baggage to a little room nearby. In vain did we try to make the young lady understand that we had a right to pass a certain amount of new clothing per traveler.

The lady custom officer would not show any sympathy in our case; however, she did permit the trunk of the young lady, traveling with us, to pass without paying any duty whatsoever, even though her trunk contained several new suits, new clothing, and several other objects. The custom officers who must have been of the same type as the lady, soon were of the same opinion about us and likewise treated us in the same brusque manner. They checked all even to the last piece of underwear, no longer seeing a difference between new garments, and those which had been in use, but well taken care of. All this took place in presence of several passengers of the male sex.

An American gentleman, seeing the embarrassing and unjust situation, took our part and tried to hurry the men who were weighing the articles and calculating the cost. The resulting duty was excessive. Poor Mother, taken by surprise and full of anguish, began to gather together the last cents of our money. It was impossible to meet the exorbitant and unjust sum. Something else had to be done. The situation was indeed a very trying one with Mother and her companion in front of the counter, surrounded by the employees looking on coldly and indifferently, only waiting to receive the stipulated sum. While the lady custom officer, if she may still be called a lady, began to speak in a low tone to the men. The situation was aggravated, for they began to make arrangements to have our trunks left in the office of the "Aduana" while we travel on to Mexico without them. The American gentleman made some arrangement to which all agreed, under condition that Mother Seraphina would sign the contract. Meanwhile, the people in the train were already growing quite impatient at the long delay.

The heavy trunks, very badly repacked, were stored in the express car. Highly embarrassed, Mother and her companion returned with anxiety to join the other Sisters, who almost beside themselves were waiting for their return. A gentleman, who was well informed of the case, declared that

it had been a great injustice and that we should make a formal complaint when we reach Mexico. After a few moments of mortification and after passing some comments on the matter, we resigned ourselves with begging God to remedy the situation. Nevertheless, we Mexican Sisters felt very much ashamed and mortified on account of this first disagreeable incident experienced on entering Mexican territory.

The rest of the journey went without incident. We passed the time observing all the interesting people we met, especially at the stations, the beautiful landscapes of every description, historical places, etc. While observing all this, we still found time to make plans for our new foundation. Thus the memory of that disagreeable experience gradually became obliterated as we neared the end of our journey.

It was the eleventh of December. After rising, Mother Seraphina told us that this very night we would arrive in Mexico City. "Ay, si Madre!" was our joyful reply. The whole day was spent in packing and unpacking. We ate very little, prayed very early, and by the afternoon we were ready. Soon night drew near and we reached our journey's end. It was about eight or nine o'clock when the train pulled into the station. A great crowd of people was moving about, anxiously looking for those whom they expected, and very soon we found ourselves in the arms of our parents and friends, who full of joy could scarcely realize that they had the happiness of seeing us again, and that as religious.

After greetings were exchanged, a great dispute followed. For everyone wished to take us to their homes, especially between Senora Domenzain, the mother of the young lady who had been educated with us in Los Angeles, and Senor Santiago de la Torre, father of Sister Rosa. Finally, it was decided that the latter should have the honor. He took us to his carriage and we set off at once. According to Mother's wishes, we stopped at the Santo Domingo Monastery first. There no one expected our visit at that time, so it was a very great surprise to the Dominican Fathers who came down at once to receive us, especially the Rev Joaquin Rodriguez, O.P., and Father Ricardo Olea, O.P. They opened the church and turned on all the electric lights. Full of gratitude we all prostrated before the magnificent altar of the Blessed Sacrament. The church was beautifully decorated for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Since it was very late we had to bid goodbye to the good Fathers, promising to return

very soon. On the way we could hardly believe that we were really traversing the streets of Mexico City.

Very soon we arrived at the famous Atzacapotzalco. The carriage drove into the wide open portico. It was a triumphal entry. The whole family came down to meet us. It can be imagined what hearty welcomes, exuberant conversations, and non-ending questions followed during the days spent with this good family, who thanks be to God, have still preserved their Mexican customs.

The following day we intended to go to the Villa, as it was the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There would be so many people that it would be almost impossible for us to enter. We would have gone in the afternoon, but to avoid danger, we deprived ourselves of this great and much desired pleasure and contented ourselves with assisting at the solemn Mass and ceremonies at the parish church. The functions were both solemn and elevating. The sermon, delivered by the parish priest, Rev. Constantino Martinez Alvarez, O.P., was very eloquent, touching and so very patriotic. It made a deep impression, even upon those accustomed to hearing their beloved pastor, and a still deeper one upon us Mexicans, who for so long a time had not heard the Word of God in our own language, nor in our own country, nor a sermon on a subject so dear to us as the "hermosisima Indita Guadalupana", our beloved Mother.

Very early the following day we were off in Senor de la Torre's carriage to visit the Villa. But first we stopped to visit the Dominican Fathers. All came down to see us, including the Very Reverend Esteban Sacrest, O.P., Father Provincial from Spain, who invited us to partake of a cup of hot chocolate. We had dinner at the Monastery of Santa Catalina with the cloistered nuns. After that we went to the Villa. What memorable moments! What ardent petitions were poured at the feet of our beloved Mother! Very much satisfied with this, our first visit, which was rather lengthy, we left the church much consoled with the firm conviction that our new foundation, consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, would always flourish.

The following days, from Tuesday until Saturday, were spent in arranging the new house, shopping and general cleaning before the second group of Sisters would arrive. As the distance from Atzacapotzalco to Mexico is not very short--it takes three quarters of an hour by car--we would sometimes

remain for the night with some reliant families, prudently selected from the great number of trustworthy friends who disputed among themselves for the honor of lodging us.

It is but just to mention that Senor de la Torre and his family, in whose house we stayed and by whom we were assisted with loving care, well deserve our profound gratitude and sincere esteem. Various families from Atzacapotzalco came to visit us and to place themselves and their families at our service. Among these were the Zimbrons, Miss Sofia Lopez Ochoa, daughter of the prefect, and others.

On Saturday we went at the appointed hour, accompanied by Senor de la Torre, to meet the second group of Sisters arriving from the United States. We waited impatiently for the great iron gate to open in order to get as close to the train stop as possible. We planned to go to meet the Sisters some stops before the Mexico City station, but the Olaguibels came to see us in the afternoon detaining us so long that we had hardly time to get to Mexico City before the train pulled in. Suddenly the whistling and the dazzling light of the engine announced the proximity of our beloved Sisters. Soon we found ourselves in their embrace, uniting our joy to that of our families at seeing ourselves at last reunited.

As we were now eight Sisters and had different concerns needing immediate attention, Mother Seraphina decided that some of us should stay at Atzacapotzalco, while others would be occupied in making arrangements and purchases for our little house. For the time being we had to separate as each family claimed their respective "Monjita". Mother Seraphina went with Sister Juana; Sister Loretto with one of the other Sister's relatives and so on. Sunday, the nineteenth, all reunited at the Monastery of Santo Domingo where the Fathers were waiting for us.

It was the third Sunday of the month in which the Dominican Tertiaries had assisted at their meeting. Immediately afterwards the Tertiaries were presented to us. The reunion was very animated for some time, until at a sign from Mother Seraphina, we bade farewell to return to our respective places of lodging. Reverend Joaquin Rodriguez had ordered a carriage to take us home as the rain was falling in torrents. Great was the joy of our families at having us with them even for so short a time.

Fortunately, this trying and unsettled situation was not prolonged more than for four days, at the end of which, we were finally installed in our "hidden home", where we eagerly awaited the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ on Christmas eve."

The above chronicle was recorded by Sister Guadalupe Torres, wherein she relates the journey to Mexico to open the new foundation at Atzacapotzalco, under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe. (Nov. 23, 1909 - Dec. 16, 1909).

COMPILER'S NOTE: In order to keep the story in chronological order, Mother Seraphina Maerz' diary of 1910 will be inserted here following Chapter II, JOURNEY TO MEXICO TO OPEN NEW FOUNDATION, 1910.

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CHAPTER VIII

RUMORS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION (1924 - 1925)

Letters of Mother Mary Pius

Letter #18
To Mother Seraphina

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
September 12, 1924

I sent my last letter to you in June. Now I must write again, begging you anew to give Mother Pia as little as possible of its contents. I know that after the General Chapter so many demands, reasonable or not, come snowing in until the beginning of September. The changes and re-changes are a source of many heart-and-headaches for any General Superior in good health, and even though our Mother is so ill, she still drags herself to Holy Mass and all the exercises possible to set the example. May God help her! We here at the Novitiate will do the utmost to avoid trouble!

Perhaps in these days the General Council will meet to elect a Superior for El Rosario. May I, in confidence, make some suggestions? She must not be too old. She must have a mother's heart for all the children; she must also be willing to do without most of the commodities which in the States seem necessary, but in our present poverty have to be considered as incidental luxuries. And, Mother Seraphina, make it clear that in Mexico things must be done a different way than in the States, otherwise she will be unhappy and make others so.

You will be interested to hear that the Catholics of the different states of the Republic are busily engaged in the vast preparations for the Solemn National Eucharistic Congress to be celebrated in the capital in October. They want to make it as grand as possible, sincerely hoping and praying that President Obregon will give his consent. It would be crushing if any unsavory incident should occur.

At present, of course, the burning question moving the masses is: Who will be elected? As I told you in my June letter, Calles and Flores are the two candidates. You have

no idea how fast the existing socialism is becoming right out-and-out atheistic Communism; hence the just fear of ruthless despotic Calles.

Even if Obregon ever was a Christ-hater, he had not during the first two years of his incumbency openly persecuted the Church. Our trustworthy friends held that the reason for this so-called clemency was that he had not as yet been recognized by the United States. Once, however, this having been achieved, he showed his sharp claws - but still, on the whole, he did not enforce all the terrible articles of the Constitution of 1917, which he and his bosom friends had helped to frame at Queretaro.

I hear you ask: what about the Constitution? You are familiar with the American Constitution of 1787, framed at Philadelphia, where the venerable Benjamin Franklin, after a number of unsuccessful, gloomy sessions, rose to give an inspiring address to the Convention in which he clearly showed that the first necessity for good success lay in raising their thought to God Almighty, otherwise their labor would be in vain. He ended by saying: "I beg leave to move, that henceforth prayers to implore the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business and that one or more clergy in the City be requested to officiate in that service." Result: the Constitution of the United States.

How different the spirit at Queretaro in 1917; where one of the leading members said openly: If we could, we would devour the priests. I applaud all present who denounce priests. Christianity is a mere farce! Result: the inhuman Constitution of poor Mexico!

The infamous article #3 states clearly that teaching in all government schools is laical or confessionless; the same is imposed on all private schools. No private school can be allowed, except subject to the supervision of the government.

Article #130 orders the confiscation of any school erected for the teaching of religion. In all primary school matters, the curriculum, the teachers, etc., must be under the direction of the Federal Government. Clergymen are forbidden to maintain any institution of scientific research. The law recognizes no juridical personality in the religious

institutions known as churches. Ministers of any cult are legally incapacitated to accept any inheritance left by will or whosoever. You see, neither Pope, nor bishop, nor priest, nor religious institution are legal persons here. The state legislatures have the right to determine the maximum of ministers. There are some more articles breathing fiery hatred of Christ and His Church.

Let me add a few more items in illustration. Articles #24 and #130 state that public service must be confined to the home or to the interior of the churches and even there it is subject to government vigilance and intervention! Where is the sacredness of a private home?

The Bishops of Mexico immediately protested against the complete enslavement of the Church. The Holy See and many bishops from all over joined in the protest, but the Constitution remained.

Letter #19
To Mother Seraphina

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
October 11, 1924

The die is cast! In September, Plutarco Elias Calles was elected President of this poor country. Some of the best-informed Catholics call it a "malodorous" election; of course, it is not the first of its kind. General Flores stepped back into private life - according to Terracena he was poisoned on April 30, 1926 - and Calles triumphed as the only candidate! A Mexican wit showed in the newspapers that the letters of his name for the phrase: El turco pesca la silla! i.e., the Turk seizes the (presidential) chair!

Naturally the Catholics are trembling, especially priests and religious, because they know that no leniency can be expected from a man of his type, if once he has been inaugurated on November thirtieth. God will help us, if we live a truly religious life -- that is certain. Mother, please, pray for us.

Our Sisters are willing to go through everything, whatever God may ordain. Pray also that they will prove obedient in not uttering one word for, or against, the government. Holy Church has always enjoined on priests and religious to keep out of politics. In a country of human volcanoes and in times like these, it will be the only way to preserve the peace of the house - and not give anyone a footing for possible denunciation. I explained to our Sisters that prudence is a very necessary virtue. I fear for some communities here who seem to think that patriotism should be the first to be considered.

I am sure that Sister Laurentia Sharkey told you that a "cedula hipotecaria" (order to pay tax on mortgage) had been posted on our entrance door. I should have informed you personally, but thinking that probably you would be on a Visitation tour, I took the "short cut" via Sister Laurentia. As I told her, on Mr. Zimbron's advice, the affair was immediately handed over to a reputable lawyer. Poor Sister Superior (Sister Annunciata) suffered greatly when she heard it. She knows very little Spanish as yet, and has not had any practical experience of the possible tricks employed here.

You remember, Mother, that we still have to pay 20,000 pesos on our mortgage. Mr. S.C. had to pay the tax of 18.00 to 20.00 pesos which we should have reimbursed. Instead of informing good Mr. Zimbron or me, he waited - in high glee - until he could play this ugly trick.

According to the Mexican sales contract, the party selling has in such cases the right to insist on immediate payment. In order to create more difficulties for us, S.C. and G. have already declared before the judge that they had sent us a notice. When both presented themselves here, I told them in all politeness that they knew very well that they had omitted this courtesy, common in all civilized countries. They laughed, alleging that the methods followed were different in the various countries, to which I replied: "I admit, Gentlemen, but kindly remember that honesty and justice remain everywhere the essential rule."

Some days ago, Sister Superior took me as her companion to the American Embassy. We were courteously received. The Ambassador, however, told us, confirming the next day in writing, "that the Embassy does not give any Certificate of Protection, but that all American citizens are

entitled to the protection of the Embassy when occasion arises. If, therefore, we should have any trouble, we should communicate with the Embassy without delay." Anyhow they assured us that American property is safe. I shall keep you informed of what may happen in the near future.

Now I must entertain you about something else. For months and months some of the Sisters, even Sister Polycarp, complained about hearing at night all kinds of strange noises, e.g., as if chains were rattling; of heavy steps that would pass the dormitories; some other times heavy chests were being pulled along the colonnade, etc. At other times as if a man came close to the curtain of a Sister's cell, etc. As I had personally never seen or heard anything, notwithstanding having almost expected it, after having been informed of the gruesome history of the place. I only laughed, telling the Sisters that these noises must come from the many bats and tlacuaches. Some weeks ago the strangest thing happened.

Having received information of burglars who had broken in at various places in our vicinity, we took our famous "Spitz" into the dormitory for fear he might be killed if he remained outside. Now that very night at 11:00 p.m., "Spitz" flew out of the dormitory, barking furiously, following some person or persons invisible to us. Several times he tried to attack, but always fell back. Finally he made another brave effort - but then, his long hair standing on end, he flew to our cell. After a few minutes he went out again, following the unseen guest down the eight or nine steps to the garden door. The whole scene lasted about an hour. The dog watched some twenty minutes more and then went back to sleep. I must say that this convinced me. The next day Father Felix Rougier, M.Sp.S. came to say Mass. I spoke to him about the experience and he seemed convinced that it was the demon trying to keep the young religious in a state of turmoil, and by this causing them to return to the world.

The same day good Father Jose Guadalupe Trevino, M.Sp.S. came sprinkling all the rooms with holy water, while reciting the exorcism of Leo XIII. He advised us daily to recite it in choir - and to impose silence on the Sisters about these experiences, because otherwise there would be great danger that within a short time they would hear voices and even see human or animal forms. At the same time he warned that even after the solemn exorcism, we might again have some diabolical visitors. He energetically told us not

to fear any harm, as the demon can use only such power as God in wisdom and mercy permits him to use according to His own inscrutable eternal plans.

Some time after this, our kind Father Juan Menendez, O.P. paid us a visit. He is of the same opinion. He also made use of the exorcism. Nothing was heard or seen for many days afterwards; but then Sister Angelica told me that the previous night an old lady dressed in black and holding a candle came to her bedside, and then silently walked out again. After some time, the Sisters sleeping in the dormitory next to our cell (you remember the long narrow passage over the beautiful waterfall?) asked me if I were in the habit of leaving our cell every night at about 11:00 p.m. or midnight. When I said No! they were greatly surprised because at that time a person, coming from our cell, opened the door and went into the patio. To make the story short, I shall add only a few more instances. One night Sister Polycarp felt she was being pushed to the wall of her cell by an unseen visitor; on another occasion she saw a light coming from outside her window. Sitting up in bed, she distinctly heard him or them pushing a heavy chest. It has happened also that there were terrific noises in the kitchen as if all the pots and pans were being smashed to pieces - but the morning did not show any broken objects. (Writing this in 1965, I shall add here that during the persecution we gave shelter to the Rev. Felix Rougier. M.Sp.S. On one of the first days he called me saying: "Please do not take it amiss when I beg you not to allow your kitchen Sisters to work till midnight and after. These poor souls being overtired, made a tremendous racket." Seeing me smiling, he was astonished; but when I told him that it was only one of the manifestations I had spoken of in 1924, he dismissed the idea and performed the exorcism. I could continue almost ad infinitum about this subject but I think it will suffice. Satan is jealous of us poor human beings because we are potential saints, while he in one moment of pride, was cast into hell. This is why he uses his power of "fallen angel" in various ways to make us lose heaven.

Letter #20
To Mother Pia

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
November 5, 1924

Today I am knocking at your motherly heart for Sister Annunciata Henke. Yesterday we went again to see Dr.

Ortega in Mexico City. After having carefully studied her X-rays, ordered to be taken some days previous, he told us it was a case of TB of the bones; that her lungs were still clear, but he cannot guarantee how long they may remain so. His verdict is that she should be taken as soon as possible to a dry warm climate. Tlalpam's atmosphere having too much humidity would in time completely cripple her. If, however, she were in a warm, dry climate, he feels sure that she might for some twenty more years give good service to the Congregation.

When writing you some days ago, I did not know that Sister, while at our Novitiate at Altenberg, had lifted too heavy a box and in consequence injured her back. Since that time her whole right side has been seriously weakened. I did not know either that some ten or eleven years ago, a doctor in California had told her she was suffering from T.B. in the bones. You, dear Mother, sent her to Anaheim for some two or three years, but when every year about three times she was crippled for some weeks and had to stay in bed, you changed her to San Gabriel where she was able to work without ever having to miss a school day.

I know we have a great need for good German Sisters here, but if Sister Annunciata can teach in California for another twenty years or so, it seems to me that she should not be sacrificed for Mexico, where soon she would become totally incapacitated.

Letter #21
To Mother Seraphina

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
November 29, 1924

You will be very anxious to hear from us. Mother Pia, of course, will have told you about good Sister Annunciata's inability to work down here. It was a great relief to the poor soul to receive Mother's telegram with the words: "Come back." She left on the sixteenth. Most likely Mother Pia will invite her to stay a few weeks at the Motherhouse. She can tell you many things of interest.

Shortly after you received my brief letter of the fifth of this month, we had a highly interesting conference with the Messrs. S.C. and G. before the judge, who came to our house. I asked Mr. Zimbron to put me in touch with a trustworthy Catholic interpreter, as I should have to give my answers yes or no in English or in French. Mr. Zimbron had had dealings with just the right person who, however, had

mastered only French. Naturally, I wanted Sister Superior to be present at this memorable meeting, but the judge told me it was not permissible.

It was an eyeopener to me to see how both G. and S.C. did their utmost to trick me. God was very good and helped me powerfully to maintain our right by simply stating that both gentlemen knew very well that they had never informed neither Mr. Zimbron or myself of the fact that on that precise date the interest plus the tax on the mortgage were due - besides, I, being the buying partner and not Mr. Zimbron, should have been informed as is the custom everywhere else. "After all," I said to the judge, "Your Honor, this is the only point at stake in this case; all the rest these gentlemen want to allege has nothing to do with the real crux of the question here. For, if we had received an aviso and did not heed it through negligence, etc., we would have been culpable - but, if we were not informed, as is really the case before God and the tribunal of sound common sense - the treatment we received was an abuse and outrage."

This ended the session. Of course, I do not know what action this judge will take. I accompanied him to the front door, thanking him in advance for any effort he will make to help us.

We hope and pray that Mother Pia and you will find the way to send us the cheque to pay off the mortgage in gold and afterwards the fees for the judicial procedure and the lawyer. Our kind interpreter staunchly refused to send a bill, saying it was a pleasure to have been of service in the noble cause of the Church, for which I thanked him sincerely. By the way, Mother, having to pay in gold coin has at least a premium of five percent, which would bring the amount of 20,000 pesos down to 19,000. We shall heave a sigh of relief when this problem will be a thing of the past.

According to the latest information from Father Mariano and Mr. Zimbron and some others, there is great fear that Calles, after his inauguration tomorrow, will be planning and plotting to harass the he episode of 1923, when he instigated President Obregon, that bound by the iniquitous Constitution of 1917 he had to expel the Apostolic Delegate, we must be prepared for anything and everything. God, however, will never abandon us. In Him we trust, and last

but not least, in the fervent prayers of our Mothers and Sisters.

Letter #23
To Mother Seraphina

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
December 27, 1924

Alleluia! Deo gratias! Yesterday at 4:06 p.m. the mortgage of 19,000 pesos was paid in gold before the Notary Public. Thanks to your energetic pleading with Mother Pia for this speedy settlement, the danger is passed. After the good God we owe deep gratitude to dear Mr. Zimbron who has helped us so powerfully.

In joy of heart yesterday, Sister Polycarp and myself went to our Lady of Guadalupe at the Tepeyac to thank her, and also for having moved Don Luciano Tagle to deed the beautiful house, Loretto, with its gorgeous park to the Congregation. The corresponding documents were signed by both parties in the afternoon of Christmas Day.

After returning home, we sang the Te Deum in the chapel. What a blessing to have the documents before President Calles has time to "show his claws."

Knowing that Mother Pia is again incapacitated by her ailment, I come to you with our need for replacing dear Sister Annunciata as Superior here at El Rosario. You can take up the matter with Mother Pia when she feels better. May I make a suggestion? Could not Sister Teresa come here as Superior? This house is the nursery for Mexico. Sister Teresa is an excellent religious. Coming in such close contact with our young Sisters here, they would ipso facto become accustomed to see in her Mother Pia's representative. From here it would be easy for Sister Teresa to visit the other houses, which is so necessary under existing circumstances. I repeat, we have great possibilities here and elsewhere. Now, in case the General Council should not see the possibility of doing so, may I draw your attention to Sister Teresita Coghlan? She is good and energetic, cultured and highly talented, besides an excellent housekeeper. You will perhaps object that she is sometimes too vehement. I admit this, but on the other hand she is very loyal, and as before I told you and Mother Pia, she has sound common sense

- and uses it! During my more than two years of living here, I have found her to be a good and reliable person, and with good rapport toward all. I have only one thing at heart, to do the utmost to work for true religious observance, hence to impress everyone with the obligation to obey our Constitutions, knowing well that if ever we should become lax we would certainly lose God's protection.

IX - 4

I just now recall something very interesting which I forgot to mention in my last letter to you, hence I had better write about it here. For many months Mexico had been in great excitement, a National Eucharistic Congress was to be held at the capital in October this year. Naturally, everybody took it for granted that the committee in charge had arranged matters with President Obregon and had secured his permission to hold the closing procession in the Parque Lira, a private property surrounded by a high brick wall. The several functions of the Congress were held in the various churches of the capital. In their enthusiasm, thousands of people from all walks of life had decorated their houses, as is the custom here for all great festivities.

Then the unexpected happened. On October 8, when the celebration was at its highest peak, President Obregon issued a fulminating denunciation saying that "it was a violation of the law prohibiting public religious acts outside of the church." Can you understand this? I cannot. The people decorated their homes with the flags of the country, and displayed some religious emblem and perhaps some bunting! The following day he published another arbitrary decree discharging all public employees who had taken part in the religious ceremonies or only decorated their houses.

The Catholics were stunned. Who would have expected such bitter opposition? Was Calles again the spiritus rector as in 1923?

Be that as it may, we have to be prepared, for the future will certainly not be rosy. It is, however, in God's hands. If not one hair can fall from our head without His holy Will, then certainly nothing can harm us. He will ever guide us and lead the way out of the difficulties.

Please, Mother Seraphina, do pray for us. Please let us know how our Mother is faring. I fear that we shall not have

her with us much longer. Diabetes at the stage as it is in Mother's case, is a most treacherous foe. It is almost a miracle that she has held out so bravely until now. God will certainly reward her sacrifices.

Letter #24
To Mother Seraphina

El Rosario, Tlalpam, D.F.
March 25, 1925

Your letter of February 20 in answer to my heartfelt condolence is again before me. Oh! how sad it is! Yes, Mother, we lost very much on February 8, when Mother Pia closed her eyes. On the ninth, Sister Teresa informed me - the shock was almost too severe - but gradually a great happiness came over me in the thought that Mother Pia was with God, Who certainly accepted her many great sacrifices physical and moral.

Mother, between the lines of your letter I read your deep heartfelt sorrow. As long as I have known you, you have been Mother Pia's shadow; her ideas were yours; her wishes commands - and now you are alone with all the various problems on your shoulders. Take courage! You know, and that must be a great comfort, that 95% - 97% are loyal, hard-working Sisters, true as gold. They will obtain by their prayers the superhuman strength needed by a General Prioress. So far as I know you will be Mother's successor. I wish I could embrace you and tell you all my heart feels for you. Instead, I must hasten to keep you informed about the present crisis in Mexico.

I hope you received my letter in which I told you of the inauguration of President Calles. Nothing startling happened in December and January, many became quite optimistic, speaking about a possible change of heart in this self-styled "Iron Man." In reality, however, he had been over-busy forming a secret plan to assess the death-blow at the Catholic Church by setting up a Mexican Catholic Church independent of the Holy See.

February 21, 1925, a group of armed men entered the venerable church of La Soledad, one of the oldest in the Capital, dating back to 1534. By force they drove out the sacristan and the faithful who were praying there in silence. Not too many minutes later, a priest, accompanied by a number of police, entered and proclaimed himself "Patriarch of the Mexican Catholic Church." You will naturally ask: "Who is

he?" It is Father Joaquin Perez, seventy-two years old, who had been for quite a while an inmate of Dr. Garcia's Insane Asylum here at Tlalpam! Perez' helpers were some disreputable men. One of the former weavers of La Rama Tlalpam has been reported to be aspiring after a still higher post in this National Church - that of Pope!!! The whole thing is ridiculously outlandish, but it prepares for coming events.

You can well understand that the Catholics immediately remonstrated, because a Church as venerable and dear to them as La Soledad having been taken by force created quite a sensation! Owing to the tremendous scandal created by Perez' entrance of La Soledad, Calles thought it best not to confirm the poor Patriarch in his coveted parish. Instead he gave him the Corpus Christi church in the Avenida Juarez. Now, because the faithful had so energetically protested against their ejection from La Soledad, Calles confiscated it! For sure this National Church will never be successful here.

On March 24, all our Dominican Fathers were suspended as foreigners by the government! They are not allowed to preach, say Mass, hear confessions, etc. So far they are not yet expelled, but that will not take too long. Our Dominican Fathers now act as chaplains of the various convents; while the Holy Spirit Fathers go every morning to the Church of Santo Domingo, El Rosario and the rest of the Dominican churches in and around the capital, as they are native priests.

Some days previous there had been much alarm here in Tlalpam, the news having arrived that Calles was going to confiscate the parish church. One hundred and fifty men slept on its roof to be ready for its defense. We all dressed as seculars, because heaven alone knows what these Mexican soldiers might be up to. Nothing happened, this seemingly not being the opportune moment to strike. After four days we dressed in the habit again; but the teachers, the portress and those who had to go out, will have to use secular dress. We must be most careful, for "the would-be Pope is in town every day." No honesty, no justice can be expected from a government like ours here; besides we know that Calles is trying his utmost to bring the presidential term from four to six years.

The four days we used civilian clothes my "heart of hearts" made me feel that He would inspire us to do the right

thing at the right moment. In order to save ourselves we resolved to adopt the following plan:

1. S.M.P. is an American lady who owns the place and keeps a day school. Not knowing Spanish, the Misses Mercedes and de Chantal are her assistants; the school has only lay teachers.
2. There is an American boarding school connected with it. Young ladies from all over the Republic are trained in all branches of science and the domestic arts. There are a number of cooks and servants.
3. By this arrangement we hope to save the situation for the present. Besides, we are laying up a "store" of appropriate secular clothes with which we are practicing to dress fast.

Today I shall write Sister Teresa to have her Sisters use black dresses. In this way they can pass without comment; but should they continue using monastic mantles on the street, they will only be insulted as has happened already.

Today, the 24th of the month, I heard from a most reliable source that the next step will be to close all religious schools. Never mind, Mother, if the persecution should last longer than we hope, God's help will be more efficacious.

The Catholics of Mexico are not idle, fettered as they are by the impious laws of their godless leaders! In 1913, the Rev. Bernard Bergoend, S.J., from the French Savoie, had begun to organize the A C J M, i.e., Asociacion Catolica de la Juventad Mexicana, patterned after the Catholic Association of the French Youth. In a small town near Guadalajara, there is an enthusiastic young Catholic lawyer, Anacleto Gonzalez Flores, who since 1916 has thrown himself wholeheartedly into the work of the ACJM. Tenaciously he holds to the idea of Peguy: "A revolution must be moral or nothing! Freedom is the prerequisite to human worth, a freedom won by resolve, held by honor. Freedom consists in believing. Freedom is the opportunity to believe... to pray that a whole people be spared from mildew, becoming rotten in spiritual death - in eternal death - in

hell! Anacleto Gonzalez Flores did and does do much to unite the youth of Mexico as also for Catholic Action. Study clubs are being organized for the study of Catholic social philosophy. There the admirable encyclicals of Leo XIII, the works of other eminent Catholic sociologists as Bishop Ketteler, Cardinal Manning, Count de Mun, etc., are being expounded. The young men thus imbibe the spirit of great patriots as Daniel O'Connell, Windthorst and their heroic fight for Christian principles. Many of these study clubs are named after the great defenders of the faith as Garcia Moreno of Ecuador, Iturbide, the Maccabees, Judith, de Valera, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. It seems that Anacleto is the spiritus rector in all of them. By last year, 1924, there was founded the Union Popular on the model of the Volksverein under Windthorst during the German Kulturkampf. Would to God that those noble efforts will spread rapidly over the whole of this poor oppressed Republic.

The Damas Catolicas are said to have organized since 1915 in order to defend their God-given right to provide Catholic spiritual and moral training for their children. I must say, according to what I learn from my well-informed helpers, that the Catholic woman is valiant. I wished the great majority of men had some of their energetic courage. If they had done something to stem the tide the enemy would not have gained the upper hand, even Poinsett would not have done one-tenth of the harm he did.

But, sad to say, the great bulk of the masculine population here, as in South America, only look out for their own material personal well-being!

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